

DISSENT FROM WITHIN

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The Hidden Story of the Anti-Whaling
Members of the Makah Tribe

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Silencing Tribal Grandmothers -- Traditions, Old Values At Heart Of Makah's Clash Over Whaling

by Linda Hogan

"When I was young the whales came up and they used to scrape the reef to get their barnacles off." - Alberta Thompson, Makah elder

Driving through the deforested world near Neah Bay, I say, "it must have been beautiful," because it still is, even logged. I think this of us, too, as people. We must have been beautiful.

As tribal people, the past is a country we look to. Those of us who are indigenous are wanting to find a way back to that past, to lay claim to the older world that sustained our ancestors with its richness. Our hearts still hurt for the injustice and corruption that took place at the time of treaty-making, at the smallness and greed of the Americans whose lifeways would destroy so much of our world.

No one else on this continent knows as we do the pain of our loss, the waters now thinned, the mines, the highways through our sacred grounds, the current plans to develop or to store nuclear waste that are sometimes even welcomed by native people who become falsely convinced that this will provide a solution to our economic difficulties.

In more recent times, we have become the ones others look toward. They seek us out as wisdom-keepers, as the first ecologists, as living examples of how to live in the world. And yet, many of us, too, are searching for a way back to traditions before those times of change. Some of us will find it. Some still have it. Some are too tied in with other systems of knowledge and values to return to the richness and strength that was the source of our cultures.

A noted historian said that if someone from the mid-1800s were to suddenly find himself in today's 1990s, the astonishment would not be over technology, or air travel, or telecommunications - it would be the discovery that a wolf, a coyote, even a whale might have its own lawyer speaking out for its rights in the ecosystem that we share with other species. These lawyers might argue that the whales are not just elders of our own species, they also demonstrate a significant and alien intelligence, a complex social system of pod-families, a remarkably nonviolent community, and communication skills we have yet to fathom.

As of yet, there are no lawyers speaking out for the sovereign nation of whales, these ancient mammal kin to our species. But there are human elders speaking out for the great gray whales. Some Makah elders are speaking at personal risk and for no gain. No one is going to pay them a million dollars a whale, as some say the Japanese have promised the tribal council.

Chamblin's tribal ancestors include Chief Sealath, who said, "all things are connected." Do the Makah want to be connected to the great gray whale only by death? There is so much to celebrate and respect about the traditional bond between Makah and gray whale. Indeed, there are many other indigenous traditions that teach us how to respect our kinship with these magnificent marine mammals.

In New Zealand, a Maori tradition is to take the children out into the ocean for their initiation into the wisdom of the whale nation. The children float in the water while all around, humpback whales sing their lullabies. In Australia, there are petroglyphs praising the human-whale bond; in these petroglyphs, the first humans are drawn emerging from the blowholes of dolphins.

The Makah have other allies, other indigenous peoples they can turn to for talk about the whales. This is really a dialogue much deeper than treaty rights; it is about the connections we make between ourselves, other species and our living world. Let our connection with the whales - from Baja to the Bering Sea - be the human hand and heart, not the harpoon. As we begin a new century, why not listen again to the Makah elders, because these grandmothers are speaking bravely and eloquently for other elders of a species more ancient than our own.

Brenda Peterson is the author of three novels and two books of nature writing, "Living by Water," and "Nature and Other Mothers." Her most recent book is "Sister Stories: Taking the Journey Together." Peterson lives on Puget Sound.

More than a museum, this mock-whaling would be a living history and might be performed like many of the Plains Indians seasonal dances. Some of the mock-whaling ceremonies would of course be reserved only for the tribe itself; other rituals might be open to the public who would flock to Neah Bay to witness such a remarkable and revitalized tradition. Already, Neah Bay's museum is a world-class tourist attraction and there is a renewal of tribal arts with such internationally reknowned carvers as Aaron Parker, Bill Martin and Makah elder Frank Smith masterfully portraying the traditional bond between Makah and the whale.

The Japanese connection

But if what the world witnesses of the Makah is only their whale hunts - the modern non-native technology of harpoons that explode inside the whale - what effect will this have on the future of the Makah? The tribe will be allies with the Japanese, who have all but wiped out their own indigenous people, the Ainu, and also participated in the extinction of the only other distinct gray whale population, which used to migrate between Siberia and Korea. The Japanese have one of the world's worst records of environmental abuse.

Many of the younger Japanese are so shamed by their country's devastation of natural resources, both in Japan and internationally, they are turning back to nature. Henry Thoreau's "Walden" is a best-seller in Japan and ASLE Japan (Associates for Literature and the Environment) reports hundreds of university students signing up for nature-writing courses. Japan's International Cetacean Education Research Centre (ICERC) is working with ex-whaling captains who are now finding lucrative work leading whale-watching tours.

Though whale meat can be found on restaurant menus in Japan (where it sells for over \$200 a pound), many Japanese are now questioning their country's pro-whale-hunting policies.

Will the Makah align themselves with the old world of Japanese whaling or a new generation of Japanese environmentalists?

Thompson has a terrible vision if her tribe begins whaling again. It is a picture that would surely make the evening news worldwide: "If the Makah go whaling," she promises, "then some of us will be out on the boats as they try to protect the whale from slaughter." The prospect of Makah on whaling ships fighting against Makah on protective boats with the great gray migrating whales in between is a nightmare that the tribal council may well stop to consider before they return to the IWC this summer with their whale-hunt request.

As an indigenous woman, the story of the Makah and their request to whale is a familiar story, one bearing still the dimensions of an American tragedy. It is a story with many sides. It contains the history of people who, by forced assimilation, have lost their values and tradition. It speaks of children who need to know who they are. It addresses treaty rights, men determined to exercise them, an American government that has not honored its own agreements.

It's a story of environmentalists trying to protect the future, while indigenous people are trying to protect the past and bring it into the present in order to renew ourselves. In our efforts, we sometimes reveal the effects of what history has done to us, of assimilation policies that were as deadly a disease for us as smallpox and measles several generations ago.

This is a story of several members of a tribe seeking economic development after other failed attempts, a fisheries company that left behind acres of killed, unused salmon and halibut, a story of whale meat wasted after a recent killing of a gray whale despite the claim of a tribe that their proposed whale hunt is for food-taking.

Evidence is surfacing that says it is a story of secret meetings with corporations and nations, of meetings held when those with other opinions were not notified, gatherings illegal according to tribal bylaws.

It is also the story of the Makah Forestry Enterprises that clear-cut their own land and of a chief executive officer fired during that time because "his weak point was his honesty and integrity."

The story of the Makah and the gray whales may turn out to be one more painful story of corruption, of inexperienced whalers in battle with environmentalists, of the oppressed who in turn oppress their own people, of a conflict between some traditionalists who speak for old values and business leaders who negotiate contracts and have the capacity to hire public-relations specialists to help promote their whaling interests with the media, nationally and internationally.

The Makah story goes further than this, into the territory of intimidation and harassment of the old women who, in earlier times, would have been the respected voice of their people.

Ordinary lives, extraordinary courage

As such within this territory, it has also become the story of women with ordinary lives rising to extraordinary courageous action, including women

whose ancestors were signers of the 1855 treaty with the United States. And how two of these grandmothers in wheelchairs were called "dangerous" by the younger men of their tribe as they went to the International Whaling Commission to speak out against the proposed whale hunt of their own tribe.

"What has this old lady done to aggravate them? What am I onto that they would think I'm so dangerous?" This is the question asked by Makah elder Alberta Thompson and it's a strong one. Why would the old grandmothers frighten the business leaders of a tribal nation?

"I've taken a stand for the whales." Thompson says. "I've gone to Scotland and refuted their lies. I'm 72. None of us have even tasted a whale or know how to prepare it or cut it. They lied and said we were starving."

In the case of the Makah, despite how the hired public-relations experts have presented the problem, there is conflict within the tribe itself. While more traditional tribes are presently uniting to fight corporations and governments, the Makah council has decided to join forces with them. There are those who oppose this union.

Dotti Chamblin, who has asked for an ethics committee for the tribal council, is considered by some to be a cultural leader. She is from a whale-hunting family, the descendent of chiefs and treaty-signers, a woman who received a rare standing ovation for a talk she gave at the National Congress of American Indians.

She says, "There's something very wrong here. We created a stir just by seeking the truth and asking them to tell it. Because of this treatment, no one else will speak up for the rest of the people, and that's a sad state of affairs. They've ostracized us. They've victimized us. It's difficult to get health care. They treat me badly. It's not the Makah way. There is a young, educated faction that is in breach of tradition."

Yet, it is most often these days that this faction has a voice in the outside world and is in the position to negotiate contracts for the tribe. In the Makah case, the council has made a case for whaling, and they have tried to silence the grandmothers, even going so far as to make a token request for police backup at the International Whaling Commission meeting in Scotland, to protect the men from two grandmothers in wheelchairs who spoke powerfully enough to have the hunt delayed another year.

"They say they're traditional but they are not listening to or protecting the

aware of past cultural genocide. However, our concern is to act on behalf of whales who have also suffered."

Who will be responsible?

Thompson tells the story: "I asked the chairman of the Makah Whaling Commission, 'Who is going to be responsible for the first deaths? - because there will be deaths.' "

Not only the whales, but humans may die. Whether it's harm to environmentalists who will try to stand between the whales and the Makah harpoons, or the Makah themselves who have no training in the whale factory ships, Thompson worries about her tribe's future relationship with its own people, our country and the world at large.

"The tribal council isn't telling the world that we Makah are really split on this issue and there is a silent majority that is just afraid to speak out against whaling because the tribal council tells them it will threaten our treaty rights. This is not true at all. Our treaty rights will stand whether we go whaling or not."

These Makah grandmothers are seeking to stop the whaling request, but they are also reaching out to environmentalists and the public for alternatives. For example, might the federal government pay the tribes not to whale in the same way they subsidize farmers not to plant crops? Whale watching along the West coast is a \$100 million yearly business. Why shouldn't the Makah share in this more benevolent use of a natural resource, the same way the Boldt decision declared that Indians had a common right to salmon and other fisheries?

There is a great deal of potential for cultural-based whale watching in Neah Bay," says Dr. Toni Frohoff, consultant to The Humane Society of the United States. "Whale watching may be a viable alternative to whaling which would not violate the trusting relationship between whales and humans which has been carefully established over many years. In New England, the history of whaling is kept alive through museums and whale watching."

More actively, we on the West Coast could witness a return to Makah mock-whaling, much like the Native tradition of "counting coup," in which the warrior simply touched his opponent instead of taking his life. This simulated whaling would satisfy cultural and social tribal traditions, while also distinguishing the renewed Makah bond with the whale as a unique environmental and ceremonial tradition.

Alberta Thompson is a 73-year-old Makah who not only signed that opposing statement but also attended the IWC meeting in Scotland to speak out against Makah whaling. Dotti Chamblin is also against her tribe's return to whaling, though her great-grandfather Ba-Ba-Sit, who died in 1907, was the last Makah to hunt whales. Raised in The Old Way, Chamblin is a traditional healer and professional in education and health care who recently ran for tribal council and lost to a pro-whaling member.

Thompson and Chamblin criticized the lack of consensus and consultation on the part of their tribal council. Pushing for whaling, "the council went ahead without consent of the tribe," Thompson said. "They say they have 70 percent, but that isn't so." According to Thompson and Chamberlin, there is no Makah tribal consensus on the issue of whaling, though the tribal council has officially stated to the news media that they are acting for the whole tribe.

When an impromptu vote was called, only 104 of the 600 Makah cast their vote and only 70 voted yes. From that unrepresentative sample, the council claimed consensus. But Thompson points out that the tribal council is not talking to the tribe; they are in fact silencing the elders who first signed the anti-whaling statement. That published 1996 statement by the elders concluded: "We think the word 'subsistence' is the wrong thing to say when our people haven't used or had whale meat/blubber since the early 1900s . . . We believe the hunt is only for the money."

As the tribal council prepares again to seek IWC permission to take whales, Chamblin adds: "It's grandmothers fighting this fight against them. The tribal council issued a memo that nobody was to talk to the newspaper. . . . They wanted to banish those of us who oppose whaling from the reservation. This fear of banishment really stopped a lot of people from helping us."

Because the Makah are both members of a tribe as well as citizens of the U.S., they live in two worlds and sometimes their two sets of laws are at odds. The women would like to see their young people and tribal elders talk openly together about the relationship between the Makah and the great gray whales. Why, these elders ask, is there no open forum within the tribe for a whaling debate? Why is there no environmental education and spiritual training about the whale?

Some organizations are quietly and selflessly working to open a dialogue with tribal representatives while hoping that traditional spiritual values of everyone will help find solutions benefiting whales and Makah alike. Will Anderson, who has been involved with this issue from the beginning, says, "This is a painful issue for us because we have supported Native American rights and are well

elders," says Chamblin, whose brother was on the tribal whaling committee when they had as many as 50 secret meetings without notifying him. "Shooting a whale with a machine gun is not a spiritual way." Chamblin has spoken of religious tradition and spiritual law that go deeper than politics, deeper than governments. "But no one in this village has a direct relationship with the whale any longer."

Latecomers to tradition

For those who want to whale hunt, the talk about spiritual traditions has been late in coming, only a recent afterthought to her words to the commission, although now it has become a dominant part of the discussion as the case is represented to the United States, the media, and to the International Whaling Commission.

There is a fine line between hunting as ceremony and the breaking of spiritual laws. For the Makah, whale hunting in the past was tied together with an elaborate and complex web of culture and belief. In older days, a whale hunt would have been a mighty event with much preparation, made out of deep need and hunger, love and respect for the whale.

Alberta Thompson says, "I would never have spoken this way in the 1800s because the whale was a staple, but this is no longer so. Also, in traditional times, the leftover whale meat would have been used at Makah days, a traditional time," she says, referring to the netting of a whale by Dan Greene, Makah fisheries director. Instead, during Makah days, 72-year-old Thompson was issued a resolution, hand-delivered to her by the acting chief of police, that she was not to speak about whaling or even "make a face," or she would be arrested. A ruling was also made that only tribal council members and their hired PR people were allowed to speak with the press and media.

After Greene, council member Marcy Parker and fisheries assistant director Dave Sonnes called her a slave - slaves having no human rights in Makah tradition - and it appeared in the Vancouver Georgia Strait newspaper, Thompson said to Greene from the door of her mobile home, "Look at these four little walls here and you harass me. This is small in more ways than one."

"In my belief and training, we have the right to have our say. But we're treated with hostility and hatred," Chamblin says. Recently when one of the women tried to speak, a council member stood up and sang over her voice, trying to drown out her words. There is aggression toward the women. The pro-whaling tribal members even ignored their first petition. That the oldest women of the tribe have been threatened and silenced speaks volumes about the tribal council.

Because whaling is the right of the Makah people, some say this is merely an exercise of treaty rights. But the treaty also says that the tribe "finally agrees not to trade at Vancouver Island or elsewhere out of the dominions of the United States." To do so would make the Makah the breakers of their own treaty and would weaken and jeopardize their rights in the future, endangering their sovereignty. But Greene, the controversial head of tribal fisheries, has said they intend to commercialize.

The way in which the Makah request carefully states that only the edible portions of the whales will not be traded or sold, seems to be a way of sidestepping the law and misrepresenting their intent. The fat, oil and byproducts, which can be traded, are worth money. Norway stores three hundred tons of blubber from the minke whales and cannot trade it, according to international law. The Japanese wish to buy it for upward of \$46 million. It is important to note that the governments of Norway and Japan are behind the Makah bid to whale. The Japanese, sources maintain, have already offered money to the Makah. Five is the requested yearly quota. But, as Thompson says, "We couldn't get one whale eaten. What will we do with five?"

The U.S. government says it is persuaded that the request to whale represents legitimate needs of the Makah and constitutes aboriginal subsistence whaling. They have cited nutritional needs. If eating the meat is the primary purpose, there are other considerations.

The Inuit comparison

With their request to whale, the Makah have been compared to the Inuit who, unlike the Makah, have an uninterrupted tradition as a whaling people. But the Inuit suffer from the highest concentrations of PCBs in breast milk of anyone in the world. In recent times, many young mothers have resorted to feeding infants non-dairy coffee creamer mixed with water, risking malnutrition rather than the poisoning their babies.

And while our treaties must still hold, in these days there are new considerations. At the time our treaties were created, we did not foresee the loss of species, large-scale toxicity, the thinning of waters, the deforestation of continents.

If, as some Makah council members and the whale delegation maintain, the whale hunt is about cultural revitalization, then we have to consider that in traditional cultures when the old women speak, the young people listen. That is how it's done in indigenous councils and communities throughout the world. So what is it that closes the ears of these council members to the voices of the

The Makah's story is one chapter of the gray whale's long journey; but this tribe's debate over whether to go whaling again after over 70 years is absolutely crucial to the survival of the gray whale. Just off the Endangered Species list for two years, the gray whale faces new dangers: According to the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Japanese company Mitsubishi and the Mexican Ministry of Trade are once again proposing the build the world's largest salt factory right next to Laguna San Ignacio, the only birthing lagoon undisturbed by human encroachment.

In these shallow nursery lagoons, the newborn calves are buoyed up by the kind salinity of intense salt content in these tropical waters. They nurse on mammalian whale milk so rich the calves gain 100 pounds of baby blubber a day. Within three months, the calves and mothers begin their migration along our Northwest Coast up to Alaska and Siberia, where under subsistence quotas for aboriginal people, the gray whales are hunted with automatic weapons and anti-tank rockets; their meat sold to Russian fur farms for fox food. According to the Canadian periodical Arctic Circle: "The gray whale slaughter casts a long shadow over the legitimate harvest practices of aboriginal people in Russia and throughout the circumpolar world."

The shadow is falling now not only across the gray whales' migratory route, but also upon the Makah. The reason the whole world is watching what the Makah do, is that their decision will profoundly determine the future of whaling. If the Makah decide to exercise their treaty rights and go whaling, some other tribes along the coast that have shown an interest in whaling may do the same. While the Makah claim that taking five whales a year will have no environmental impact, this domino effect would surely pose a threat to the gray whale populations.

Whaling nations like Japan, Russia and Norway are watching the Makah because their precedent could create a new IWC category of whaling: cultural heritage as the only requirement for an aboriginal quota.

As a recent report by Rick Spill of the Animal Welfare Institute points out, Makah whaling could clear the way for Japan and other countries to practice cultural coastal whaling without demonstrating a nutritional need and "without having to officially repeal the existing moratorium against commercial whaling." Makah whaling would also undermine the U.S. in its international stance against whaling. While the federal government supported the Makah last year in their intent to request IWC support for whaling, the U.S. Congress unanimously passed a bipartisan resolution opposing the Makah whale hunt.

The Makah's request to the IWC last year was officially withdrawn after seven of their tribe's elders signed a petition against whaling.

Ironically, the 20th-century history of the Makah bears some sad similarities to the gray whale: In the mid-1800s, at the same time the Makah found their villages ravaged by smallpox, measles, and other diseases of their conquerors, the gray whales migrated to Mexico to give birth in ancestral lagoons, only to be brutally slaughtered. Yankee whalers massacred newborn gray whale calves as bait to bring their mothers beside the whaling boats. After such brutal slaughter, the gray whale was believed almost extinct and the Makah stopped their hunt - an example that was not followed by other nations until the International Whaling Commission (IWC) in 1946 prohibited gray whale killing. The U.S. banned all whaling in 1971, then placed the gray whale on the Endangered Species List.

Now, at the turn of another century, we can thank: the Makah, who first put away their harpoons; the Mexican government, which in the 1970s declared the Baja birthing lagoons the world's first whaling sanctuary and in 1988 created the Vizcaino Biosphere Reserve for gray whales; the growing environmental movement, and the IWC for bringing the great whales almost back from the brink of extinction to their ancestral waters.

Some scientists disagree with the delisting of the gray whale, citing evidence of lower populations than the United States census of 21,000, and their concern for the increasing pollution of our oceans. Gray whales are sea-bottom feeders and as such are the first to show toxicity; some scientists are concerned about the increasing toxicity of PCBs and heavy metals found in our mammal kin.

What does this say about our native waters? We are connected to the whales by the air we breathe and the seas we share. That is why the recent success story of returning the gray whale to its rightful habitat isn't just about healing and restoration - it's about our mutual survival. It's also about a new, interdependent way of looking at our fragile, blue plane.

Today, in those Baja birthing lagoons, scientists are documenting the "Friendly Whale Syndrome," which since 1975 has mystified the world. Why would gray whales - who twice in the last 120 years have faced extinction from whaling - now come so near our boats, occasionally allowing human touch? And recently, along our own Pacific Northwest coast, whale-watching boats report the gray whales are approaching them, as if curious or trusting. What kind of new bond is this between species? And what does this bode for the future of human and whale kinship systems if we begin again to hunt these friendly whales along the ancient 10,000 mile migration of these great grays?

The whale's long journey

Makah anti-whaling delegation, who risk harassment, intimidation and unduly harsh treatment by the other members of their own tribe?

Perhaps we can narrow it down to the question of who stands to gain by whale hunting. Not these grandmothers who have already lost so much by speaking out, who also spoke out against the Whiting fisheries that left behind so much devastation that it ruined the fishing businesses in the region. "Whiting said 50 families would benefit from their business," one of the women says. "But only five families did."

There is also the unremembered story of the whales who do not belong to human beings. While they may be part of a cultural complex, now they must stake their own claim to life. They do not understand our boundaries: they only pass through these places on their journeys of survival, and they pass through the waters of other people than just the Makah. The gray whale have been removed from the Endangered Species list too soon. Some maintain that the U.S. population counts are high. If there is even a thin line of doubt, it would be wise to protect that species, and in these times, to further endanger any species is no longer a human privilege. Nor would it be culturally appropriate for those whose lives have always centered around respect for the whale.

The spirit of the whale

"They haven't reckoned with the spirit of the whale," Thompson says. And this is true in more ways than one, in all the meanings of these words.

There are consequences of the hunt, not only the fight of the whale sometimes known to turn on its hunters, but in the fact that in the old days the relationship between the people and the whales was the significant factor to every whale kill. If a whale hunt was done incorrectly, just as we are learning from the science of ecology, balance was disturbed. The pro-whaling leaders seem no longer aware of the consequences of their actions even though the consequences are visible all around them.

The Makah stopped whaling voluntarily in 1915 because there were so few whales, their numbers diminished not by the Makah but by other, larger nations. But with such clearly different values than their ancestors held to, would they do it now?

As Indians, we have the necessity, the requirement, really, to speak out for both the old people and the old ways. What most tribes shared in common has been the respect for life. In the traditional and historic past, we recognized the sovereignty of other species, animal and plant. We held treaties with the

animals, treaties shaped by mutual respect and knowledge of the complex workings of the world, and these were laws the legal system can't come close to. That is what gave us our the past. That is what the Europeans who arrived here did not have.

In this location, at the end of the continent, a people are trying to lay claim to an older world and its complex of ceremony, but which people? Here it may very well be the silenced older women.

"Lastly, I speak on behalf of the whale," says Chamblin. "We can't have done this in vain."

But no matter what the outcome in the next year, it won't have been in vain. The future generations will look back to these times, as we always do, and will see these women as courageous as our leaders were during the treaty-making times when they offered similar speeches to their tribe and to the outside world.

There is another possible outcome to this story. If the Makah are granted the right to whale by the International Whaling Commission, and they choose not to do it, it would truly make a statement about how strong a culture can be. It would be a statement that it will look to other means for the true and deep wellspring of a culture, of a people, one that holds to a reverence for life, a concern that the whale will continue into the future.

They will set an example for others by which part of the culture they decide to cultivate. And for the children at Makah, what better example than seeing their own people take the side of life, as part of the sacred. How much that would nurture respect for themselves. That might very well restore tradition until the whale and the people reestablish a relationship of offering and receiving from one another. The way it used to be.

Linda Hogan is a member of the Chickasaw Nation. She was a delegate at last summner's International Institute on Cultural Restoration of Indigenous Opressed Peoples, which took place in Saskatoon. She is a novelist and essayist, and the organizer of a conference entitled "Endangered Species, Animals and Elders." Her books include "Solar Storms and Dwellings: A Spiritual History of the Living World."

Tribal electionso Will Speak For The Whales?

-- Elders Call For A Spiritual Dialogue On Makah Tribe's Whaling Proposal

Brenda Peterson

This Christmas, baby gray whales are being born in Baja, Calif., to continue a

cycle of life that began millions of years before humans crawled out of the primal seas. The ancestors of the great whales lived on land 50 million years ago; whale skeletons reveal vestigial hind limbs and long fingers like huge human hands inside their evolved pectoral fins. As land and sea mammals, we humans are related to the great whales, but they are our elders. And this ancient, interrelated mammal lineage reminds us that long before there were humans or tribes, treaties or laws, there were whales.

Recognizing that we are part of a kinship system that includes other species in the continuing story of evolution is one of the many wise and visionary perspectives the First Peoples of the Northwest Coast gave us.

This story of interdependence is recorded in Native petroglyphs on gray rocks that rise up from Neah Bay's shores like breaching whales. Here on this windswept northern tip of our continent, the Makah have made their villages for centuries. Makah petroglyphs of whales face-to-face with round, wide-eyed humans show the tribe's survival was interwoven with the gray whale's.

Through ceremony, art and hunting, the Makah celebrated the gifts and guidance of the great gray whale. And the whale hunt was not only for subsistence, but also to seek spiritual balance with the natural world.

Like this Native American tradition of balancing the subsistence of both body and spirit, any dialogue today between environmental groups who seek to stop whaling and the nations who want to exercise their historic treaty rights and begin whaling again, must also be a spiritual dialogue. We must engage our ethics as well as our science, our future generations as well as our history. And in this debate, we must also somehow respect the abiding culture and future health of another species: the great gray whale.

The gray whale was taken off the Endangered Species list in January 1993. It is common knowledge that the Makah along with 14 commercial fishing groups and 19 other tribes had petitioned to get the gray whale delisted with the specific goal of whaling.

What is not commonly known is that it was the Makah who in 1915 were among the first to put away their harpoons and declare an end to whale hunting. The Makah made this voluntary decision without prompting from the outside world because their chiefs had died and nobody was properly trained in the whale hunt. The Makah also saw the near-extinction of this species after Yankee whaling ships had devastated the gray whale populations to only a few thousand between the mid-1800s and the turn of the century.